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ABSTRACT

The Bachelor of General Studies degree, a special degree program at the University of Nebraska, was established in 1950, as an academic division for the exclusive benefit of adult part-time students. The program has three distinctive features: (1) any useful combination of liberal arts and professional courses is acceptable; (2) the able student can earn academic amnesty to offset potentially crippling qualitative disabilities acquired as an alienated youth; (3) liberal provision is made for translating into college degree credit the general knowledge acquired by adults through informal educational experiences. While originally developed for adult part-time students of the great Omaha area, the degree program has attracted military personnel who now account for the great bulk of the degrees conferred each year. One of the major attractions of the program has been the opportunity to decrease the time required to obtain a degree through the use of credit earned by examination. The college-level General Educational Development (GED) test which was recognized as the standardized college equivalency test, has been replaced by the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). (PT)

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The Large-Scale Use of College-Level Examination Program Credit in a Degree Program for Military and Civilian Adult Students*

- George G. Thompson**

Our colleagues who teach Speech 101 stress the value of beginning any presentation with an attention-getter. So while I know it is dangerous to claim uniqueness for any program in higher education, and almost equally risky to claim to be the biggest in any respect, nevertheless let me try this on you for an opener. The University of Nebraska at Omaha "consumes" more College-Level Examination Program credit than any other school in the nation.

We base this bold claim on the fact that we currently graduate over 800 students a year who individually apply, on average, more than 20 semester hours of credit from the CLEP general Examinations toward their degrees. These graduates all come from the College of Continuing Studies, the academic division on our campus which serves adult students.

The program these students follow, called the Bachelor of General Studies degree, was established in 1950 for the exclusive benefit of our adult students. As such, it has three distinctive features which set it apart from traditional Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree programs.

First, any useful combination of liberal arts and professional courses is acceptable. Second, the able adult student can earn academic amnesty to offset potentially crippling qualitative disabilities he may have acquired as an alienated youth. And third, liberal provision is made for translating into college degree credit the general knowledge acquired by adults through informal educational experiences.

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While this degree program was originally developed to meet the needs of the adult, part-time students of the greater Omaha area, military personnel soon discovered its unique advantages and, since the inception of our "Bootstrap" program in 1952, have been coming to our campus in ever-increasing numbers. Today they account for the great bulk of the 800 degrees the College of Continuing Studies confers each year.

"Bootstrapper" is our semi-official term for career military personnel assigned to temporary duty on our campus as full-time students for the express purpose of completing a baccalaureate degree. While our program was not the first in the nation, it soon became the largest. We have, to date, graduated over 8,000 Bootstrappers.

The opportunity to decrease the time required to obtain a degree through the use of credit earned by examination is certainly one of the major attractions of our Bachelor of General Studies degree. In the beginning, the standardized college credit equivalency test which we recognized was the college-level test of General Educational Development (GED), then in use by the United States Armed Forces Institute. In 1965, the CLEP General Examinations replaced the GED tests.

Throughout, we have based our credit allowance policy on the recommendations of the Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences of the American Council on Education.[1] That is, we require a score on the CLEP tests at or above the twenty-fifth percentile, using norms based on a nation-wide sample of college freshmen. For a satisfactory score, we allow six semester hours of credit for each of the five parts of the CLEP General Examinations battery, provided the student has not previously earned formal academic credit in the respective areas. This means, then, that our Bachelor of General Studies degree candidates can earn up to 30 credits through CLEP.

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1 Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences of the American Council on Education Newsletter. No. 22, December 1964

When the CLEP program was made available nation-wide to civilian students in the Fall of 1967, we at Omaha were pleased to be one of the charter group of CLEP testing centers. Now our local "evening college" type of students (adults who pursue their degree programs on a part-time basis and usually at night) have equal access to CLEP, eliminating what had been a serious inequity.

We use the same standards for these civilian adult students as we do for the military personnel in the Bootstrap program. At present, about 10 civilian students, all potential degree candidates, are taking the CLEP General Examination battery each month. The typical student thereby acquires 18 semester hours of degree credit, and what is perhaps even more important, a significant boost to his morale.

You may ask, "How did you get this policy of accepting credit by examination adopted?" It is only fair to report that when our Bachelor of General Studies degree program and our Bootstrap program were installed nearly twenty years ago, it was in the context of a small municipal university where aninnovative dean had direct access to a forceful president.

But times have changed. Just last month a university-wide faculty committee completed a comprehensive review of the topic of credit by examination. The initial attitudes of the individual committee members can conservatively be described as diverse. However, after two years of research and discussion, our existing policies were given a strong endorsement.

I feel this can be attributed in large part to the quality of our product. Our graduates are the best justification of the several non-traditional provisions of our Bachelor of General Studies degree program. As a group, our adults finish up with just under a "B" average. And since so many of them are mobile military types, we have alumni in graduate programs in dozens of universities all over the United States.

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Those of us who teach and counsel adult students are richly rewarded because our adult clients are students in fact as well as in name. In return, how gratifying it is to be able to say to such a fellow citizen: "We now have a way to recognize your achievement as a self-educating adult, and of enabling you to acquire, appreciably sooner, the passport to a larger role in our society. And here is how you can do it; here is your application blank for the College-Level Examination Program."

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